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The Conservation Reserve of the Soil Bank

a profitable way to build for the future



The Soil Bank gives farmers two new programs that they can use in adjusting production and conserving resources for the future—the **Acreage Reserve** and the **Conservation Reserve**.

Aimed directly at accumulated surpluses, the Acreage Reserve offers producers of “basic” crops an opportunity to reduce current production of these crops without loss of net income. Farmers with an acreage allotment for one or more of these crops are eligible to take part. The Acreage Reserve agreements are for one year.

The Conservation Reserve is the longer-range part of the Soil Bank. Its overall objectives are to retire general cropland from production that is not needed now, and to help conserve soil, water, trees, and wildlife.

All farmers, whether or not they produce “basic” crops, can use the Conservation Reserve. Under contracts running for a term of years, they can earn annual rental payments and also special payments to help cover the cost of establishing conservation practices.

Through the Conservation Reserve, farmers in every State can make a sound long-term investment in better land use and treatment. At the same time, they can check the unwise shift of land diverted from “basic” crops to other cash crops—helping to reduce general crop surpluses.

The payments will help maintain net income, while land is shifted from cultivation to conservation uses. And the conservation practices themselves will bring soil, water, forestry, and wildlife dividends for the future.

There are many reasons why it will pay individual farmers to study the opportunities of the Conservation Reserve carefully in planning their future farming operations. In summary, here are some of the main points to consider:

Conservation Objectives

The Conservation Reserve will help you shift land from depleting to conserving uses, speeding up your conservation work.

Your land in the reserve will be protected from erosion and leaching, and will be improved by a cover of grasses and legumes, trees, or wildlife plantings.

You can develop water resources for future use, and for wildlife.

The program is flexible enough for special conditions on your farm.

Financial Aid

You will receive up to 80 percent of the cost of establishing approved soil, water, forestry, and wildlife conservation practices on your land in the Conservation Reserve.

You will earn annual rental payments for 3, 5, or 10 years under contracts with the United States Department of Agriculture.

Your income from Conservation Reserve land will be assured, regardless of weather, crop diseases, or insect pests.

General Considerations

The Conservation Reserve—like the entire Soil Bank—is voluntary. You make the decisions on whether to put land in the reserve, and how much.

In planning Conservation Reserve programs, you will be dealing with your neighbors. Your local Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee (ASC) is in charge of administration.

As the Soil Bank achieves the major objective of reducing surpluses, you will benefit through more stabilized markets for your crops.

In brief, you can gain solid benefits for the future, as well as payments while you are making the changes.

Eligible Land

Generally, all your land used for cultivated crops or for tame hay is eligible for the Conservation Reserve.

Your land is eligible for the Conservation Reserve *if*—

1. You harvested a crop from it or had it in regular crop rotation during the year immediately before the first year of your Conservation Reserve contract.

2. You harvested tame hay or silage from it during either of the two years immediately before the first year of your contract. Tame hay is considered a stand of perennial grass or legumes normally established by land preparation and seeding.

In most counties, the smallest amount of land you can put in the reserve is 5 acres, except for acreage to be planted to trees when the minimum may be 2 acres. In counties where the average tillable acreage on farms is relatively small, the County ASC Committee may obtain permission from the State Committee to set a smaller minimum. In this case, the minimum can be 1 acre.

Land Not Eligible

Land is *not* eligible for the Conservation Reserve when—

1. Planted to small fruit, vineyards, nursery stock, orchard or nut trees. Land between the rows also is not eligible.

2. Owned by the Federal Government or by a corporation wholly owned by the Federal Government.

3. Under an Acreage Reserve agreement. When your Acreage Reserve agreement ends, the land covered by it becomes eligible for the Conservation Reserve.

4. Idle or noncrop open pasture or range.

"Banking" All Eligible Land

You may place all your eligible land in the Conservation Reserve.

There is *no limitation* on the maximum number of acres that can be "banked."

There is a limitation of \$5,000 on the total annual payment you can receive in one program year. Under some circumstances this limitation may be exceeded.

Your Farm Soil Bank Base

When you place land in the Conservation Reserve, a *Soil Bank base* will be established for your farm by the County ASC Committee.

In general, your Soil Bank base is the amount of land on which you usually grow *Soil Bank base crops*. This base is important to you because it is the starting point in crop reduction when you participate in the Conservation Reserve, and because it determines in part the amount of your annual rental payment.

The Soil Bank base crops include—

Corn, cotton, tobacco, rice, wheat, and peanuts—the six “basic” crops.

All small grains, including sorghums harvested for grain, hay, or silage.

Soybeans, flax and other oilseed crops harvested for hay, seed, or silage.

Field and canning peas harvested for hay, seed, or silage.

All vegetables, strawberries, watermelons, cantaloups, and specialty cash crops such as mint.

Potatoes, both white and sweet.

Sugar beets and sugarcane.

Sudan, millet, annual rye grass and similar annual grasses if harvested for seed.

Mangels or cow beets.

Establishing Farm Soil Bank Base.—To establish your farm Soil Bank base for contracts *beginning in 1957*, the County ASC Committee will determine the average number of acres you used to produce Soil Bank base crops during 1955 and 1956. The land you have in the Acreage Reserve during either or both of these years will be figured into the average. Here's an example:

	<i>Acres</i>
Soil Bank base crops in 1955.....	80
Soil Bank base crops in 1956.....	70
Acreage Reserve in 1956.....	20
Total.....	170
Soil Bank base (170 divided by 2 years).....	85

To participate in the Conservation Reserve, you reduce your acreage of Soil Bank base crops by the number of acres you bank. There is one exception, which is explained on page 4.

After 1957, your farm Soil Bank base will be the average acreage of Soil Bank base crops grown in 1955 and in each of the succeeding years before your contract becomes effective. Thus, if you wait until 1959 to sign a contract to participate in the Conservation Reserve, the Soil Bank base will be the average of Soil Bank base crops and Acreage Reserve for 4 years—1955 through 1958.

These crops are not considered Soil Bank base crops, and will not be figured into the average to determine your farm Soil Bank base:

Any crop grown only for cover, green manure, or pasture when no part of the crop is taken off the land.

Annual grasses pastured or cut for hay or silage.

Biennial legumes, such as sweet clover.

Perennial grasses and legumes.

Vegetables grown in a garden primarily for home use.

Annual legumes, other than soybeans, cow peas, peanuts, field and canning peas and beans.

Grasses and legumes generally used for hay and pasture, such as alfalfa, red clover, crimson clover, alsike clover, sweet clover, Ladino clover, lespedeza, timothy, brome, red top, and orchard grass.

When you take land out of these crops you receive a *lower, non-diversion annual payment rate*, provided you also have put all your Soil Bank base acreage in the reserve. The nondiversion rate also can help the farmer with a small Soil Bank base to participate in the Conservation Reserve.

Nondiversion Rate

The nondiversion rate is 30 percent of the regular annual rate. For example, if your regular annual payment is \$9 an acre, your nondiversion rate will be \$2.70.

You can take advantage of the nondiversion rate if your Soil Bank base is *more* than 30 acres, and you want to bank all your eligible land. It works this way:

You will receive the full annual payment rate for as many acres as you have in your Soil Bank base. You will receive the lower nondiversion rate for the remainder of your eligible land when placed in the Conservation Reserve.

For example, you have 60 acres eligible for the Conservation Reserve, and your Soil Bank base is 40 acres. You can put the entire 60 acres in the reserve, receive the regular annual rate on 40 acres, and the nondiversion rate on the remaining 20 eligible acres.

If your farm Soil Bank base is 30 acres or less—

1. You can place any part of your eligible land in the reserve at the nondiversion rate without reducing the acreage normally used for the production of Soil Bank base crops, *or*

2. You can qualify for both regular and nondiversion rates. You can place in the conservation reserve at the full annual rate any amount of eligible land, up to your Soil Bank base. In addition, any part or all of your remaining eligible land can be put in the Conservation Reserve at the nondiversion annual payment rate. In this case, you agree to reduce your acreage of Soil Bank crops by the number of acres on which you receive the regular annual payment rate.

For example, you have 40 acres of eligible land, your Soil Bank base is 25 acres, and you decide to place 10 acres in the Conservation Reserve at the regular rate and 8 acres at the nondiversion rate. Your permitted acreage of Soil Bank base crops during the period of your contract will be 15. This is your Soil Bank base of 25 acres *less* the 10 acres placed in the Conservation Reserve at the regular rate.

Making Your Decisions

The Soil Bank is a voluntary program.

Because of its many opportunities, you will want to get all the facts

on how the Soil Bank can be put to work on your farm. When you have the facts, you make your own decisions. You decide whether you want to participate, how many acres to put in the bank, exactly which acres put in the Soil Bank will fit best into your long-time plans, and which conservation practices to put on those acres.

In making your decision on a Soil Bank program for your farm, these are important questions for you to consider:

How many more acres of land on your farm should be in permanent grassland? Are trees a better long-time investment on some or all of your Conservation Reserve land? What balance of grassland and tree-land will be most desirable? To what extent would shelterbelt plantings add to the value and enjoyment of your land? How much can your income be increased by trapping fur animals in wildlife marshes? How much pleasure will you and your family get from a fish pond or from more wildlife?

Your County ASC Committee can give you all the details of the Conservation Reserve as it will apply to your farm. The committee is responsible for the Soil Bank program in your county.

Your County extension agent can help you evaluate your present farm organization and the effect of participation in the Soil Bank on your farm business, land use, crop and livestock system. He also can help you with new research information on crop practices, seed varieties, tillage, and fertilization.

Your Soil Conservation Service technician has land capability information. If you have a farm plan with your Soil Conservation District, it's a good guide to follow. You may decide that, with Soil Bank help, you'd like to have more acres under full-time cover than was originally planned, or more than you have under cover now. The SCS technician can help you adjust your conservation plan. He can counsel most farmers on the suitability of land for the Soil Bank.

Your State forestry agency can make technical service available for planning tree and shrub plantings.

Conservation Reserve Practices

Your County ASC Committee can tell you which of the approved Conservation Reserve practices are suited to your county. You may choose from this county list the measures adapted to your land and to your kind of farming.

The practices suited to your county are chosen from a *national* list of 10 conservation measures approved for Conservation Reserve land: Your State ASC Committee selects from the national list the practices adapted to your State. In turn, your County Committee chooses from the State list the practices adapted to farmland in the county.

The national list of approved practices includes three groups:

Land Cover.—Practices designed to help you get a protective cover of grasses and legumes, or trees, or shrubs established on the land:

1. Treatment of cropland with lime, rock phosphate, or gypsum to enable you to grow legumes and grasses for soil improvement and protection.

2. Planting a permanent cover of grasses and legumes to protect soil or to change land use.

3. Establishing trees or shrubs for erosion control, watershed protection, shelterbelt, or forestry purposes.

4. Planting grasses or legumes for winter protection from erosion.
5. Planting grasses or legumes for summer protection from erosion.

Water Conservation.—To help you conserve water for better management of grazing land not in the Soil Bank or for irrigation of land in the Conservation Reserve, these two practices are available:

1. Constructing dams, pits, or ponds to permit grazing management as a means of protecting vegetative cover on land not placed in the Conservation Reserve. When the water is used for livestock, it must be piped or diverted from the pond to land not in the Conservation Reserve.

2. Constructing dams, pits, or ponds for irrigation water. Stored water can be used, during your contract *only* for irrigation of cover planted on Conservation Reserve land. While your contract is in effect, *you cannot use the water to irrigate crops for harvest.*

Wildlife Conservation.—The Conservation Reserve offers you the first cost-sharing help from the Federal Government in practices designed especially for wildlife protection. The three wildlife conservation practices are:

1. Establishing and managing cover for wildlife. The kinds of plants and the methods of planting and managing them may vary from State to State and in different parts of the same State.

2. Water and marsh management to benefit fish and other wildlife. This practice includes the development of shallow water areas to improve habitat for waterfowl, fur animals, and other wildlife. Cropland developed in the past by draining marshland may be restored by putting earth plugs or water-control gates in drainage ditches.

3. Building dams or ponds for fish.

Before you finally select one or more of the practices approved for your county, take a careful look at the kind of farming you want to do after your contract expires. Your Conservation Reserve land also may be eligible for Agricultural Conservation Program cost-sharing practices. You cannot, of course, receive cost-sharing payments from both programs for the same practice.

Conservation Reserve Payments

You can earn two kinds of payments by participating in the Conservation Reserve.

You may receive up to 80 percent of the cost of establishing the conservation practices on the reserve acreage. In addition, you will receive an annual rental payment during each year your contract is in effect. You can earn both payments during the year when practice work is done.

Cost-sharing for establishing practices.—The County ASC Committee will set the cost-sharing payments for each practice. Conservation materials and services may be supplied by the U. S. Department of Agriculture in place of part or all of the Federal cost-sharing.

Cost-sharing payments will be made after you establish the practice or practices.

Annual Payments.—The national average for the regular annual payment is \$10 per acre for land in the Conservation Reserve. Rates will vary from State to State, within States, and within counties.

The State ASC Committee establishes the regular payment rate for each county. In setting the county rates, the State Committee considers three points:

1. The cash value of the land for the production of crops customarily grown in each county.

2. The prevailing rates for cash rentals of cropland.

3. The productivity of the land in each county as compared with land in other counties of the State.

The State Committee may set different payment rates for different parts of a county. This is done when the committee finds substantial differences *within the county* in cash value of land, cash rental rates, and productivity.

The County Committee may set a lower rate than the county rate where the committee finds that the productivity, cash value, or rental value is substantially lower than the average in the county.

Annual payments will be made following the end of the calendar year, after the County Committee determines that all contract terms have been complied with.

Your Conservation Reserve Contract

When you decide to put land in the Conservation Reserve, you sign a contract with the Secretary of Agriculture, represented by your County ASC Committee.

In this contract, the Secretary of Agriculture, as provided by the Soil Bank law, agrees to—

1. Share the cost of establishing approved conservation practices on the land you place in the Conservation Reserve.

2. Pay you an annual rental on this land while the contract is in effect.

3. Protect during the contract period your acreage allotment history if any acreage of allotment crops is diverted into the Conservation Reserve.

In the contract you agree to—

1. Place specific tracts of land in the Conservation Reserve.

2. Keep the Conservation Reserve in the approved practice throughout the contract.

3. Harvest no crop from this land, except timber under good forest management, or wildlife.

4. Permit no grazing on this land. (Provision is made for the Secretary of Agriculture, because of drought or other emergency conditions, to authorize grazing by your own livestock.)

5. Control noxious weeds on this land.

6. Comply with all your acreage allotments. (You can harvest up to 15 acres of wheat regardless of the size of your wheat allotment. Any farmer may grow up to 1 acre of peanuts without being ineligible for the Soil Bank program.)

7. Reduce crop production by as many acres as you place in the Conservation Reserve, unless your Soil Bank base is less than 30 acres and you elect to take the nondiversion rate explained on page 4.

Your contract can be for 3, 5, or 10 years if an acceptable land cover already is on the land. You receive no cost-share payment when the land is already devoted to an acceptable protective cover and will be kept in that cover.

Your contract will be for 5 or 10 years if grass or legume cover must be established.

If trees will be planted, your basic contract will be for 10 years.

Rights of tenants and sharecroppers protected.—If you have tenants or sharecroppers on your farm, your Conservation Reserve contract will specify the basis on which they will share in the annual payments. This arrangement must be approved by the County ASC Committee as being fair and equitable. Cost-sharing payments for conservation work will be made to the individual who carried out the practice for which costs are shared.

Successors in interest.—If the contracting owner or tenant operator loses control of the farm for any reason, the new owner or operator may continue the contract. If the new owner or operator does not continue the contract, all cost-sharing payments must be refunded to the Government by the original contract signers.

Contracts may be changed or terminated.—Under some circumstances Conservation Reserve contracts may be modified or terminated. This can be done only by specific approval under procedures approved by the Secretary of Agriculture.

If the contract is violated.—The public's interest must be protected if the objectives of the Soil Bank are achieved. The interest of all farmers who carefully comply with the program's provisions also must be protected. For those reasons, penalties are provided when contracts are violated. The County ASC Committee checks all contracts for compliance.

Appeal to State Committee and Federal Courts.—Decisions of the County Committee regarding contract violations and penalties may be appealed to the State ASC Committee and to the Federal Courts.

Technical Help

You can get technical help to carry out the soil, water, forest, and wildlife conservation practices you decide to establish on your land in the Conservation Reserve.

Your Soil Conservation Service technician can help you install such practices as dams, pits, ponds, and marshes.

The U. S. Forest Service, working through the State Foresters, can help you with technical forestry assistance in your Conservation Reserve tree and shrub planting.

Keeping Conservation Practices on the Land

The Conservation Reserve is designed to help reduce crop surpluses by making long-term adjustments in land use and treatment. Cost-sharing and annual payments will help you make this adjustment.

Grasses and legumes will make their greatest contribution to soil improvement when they receive the fertilizer and lime they need throughout your contract period.

Tree and shrub plantings require care and maintenance for best results. Protection from fire and grazing is important.

Water stored for fish must be wisely managed if you want good fishing. One part of this management is to fertilize pond waters.

Pond dams and spillways require regular inspection and maintenance to prevent damage or washouts.

With careful maintenance of the conservation practices, your land in the Conservation Reserve will be ready at the end of your contract for the new uses you planned when you decided to participate.

And the extra dividends will continue long after the end of your contract.